

Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women

Worcester Public Hearing

REPORT

*On October 3, 2001,
the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women
held its 7th public hearing
in Worcester, Massachusetts,
at the YWCA of Central Massachusetts
One Salem Square, Worcester.*

*The purpose of this hearing was to
listen to the concerns of women,
girls, and organizations in Central Massachusetts.*

*The Commission hopes that the
comments, feedback, and input of the participants
will help us focus on some of the most pressing concerns
facing women and girls in our state.*

Attendees

Commissioners

Kathy Casavant
Marianne Fleckner, Chair
Mary Reardon Johnson
Roseanna Means

Elected Officials

Kristina Allen, Westborough Selectman
Harriette Chandler, State Senator
Juan Gomez, City Council Worcester

Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women Staff

Priscilla Golding
Heidi Kruckenberg
Phoebe Lovejoy
Sonia Shah

Worcester City Manager's Status of Women Advisory Committee

Karen Fine, Vice Chair
Robin Tuiskula, Chair

Participants from the Community

Donna Cohen Avery, Office of Child Care Services
Angela Bellas, Planned Parenthood
Joanne Bellucci, Retired Teacher
Lou Anne Branche, AAUW, LWV
Dianne Bruce, United Way of Central Massachusetts
Linda Cavioli, YWCA
Amy Chilton, Girls, Inc.
Lisa Connelly Cook
Linda Doherty, Saint Frances Home
Janet Dore, YWCA, Daybreak
Stephanie Dow, Girls, Inc., P.A.T.T.
Mary Eichorn, Montachusett Girl Scout Council
Janice Fitzgerald, Great Brook Valley Health Center
Margaret H. Gifford
Stephanie Goldenhersh, Legal Assistance Committee of Central Massachusetts
Carolyn Haglund, Worcester City Manager's Status of Women Advisory
Committee

Participants from the Community, Continued

Mozella Hargrove, YWCA Member
Tina M. Healey
Betty Hoskins
Catherine Ireland
Judi Kirk, YWCA
Carol Kozlowski, Worcester City Manager's Status of Women Advisory
Committee
Jessica LaFlamme, Girls, Inc., P.A.T.T.
Ron Madnick, ACLU
Penny Marston, Girls, Inc.
Mary Melville
Xiomara Molina, Girls, Inc.
Karen Moran, American Association of University Women
Maria Popek, Planned Parenthood
Susan Quartey
Alelia Quarwoponie
Julia Rayner, AIDS Project Worcester
Mary Scott, Quinsigamond Community College
Kristin Silva, ACLU
Lynn Simoneoni
Michelle Smith, AIDS Project Worcester
Edna P. Spencer, Worcester State College
Tara Sullivan, Planned Parenthood
Jennifer Valianti, Legal Assistance Committee of Central Massachusetts
Heather Vitek, Planned Parenthood
Elinor Waskuich, Rape Crisis Center of Central Massachusetts
Donna Wrenn, Holy Cross
Shirley Wright, City of Worcester Human Rights

Opening Remarks

Dr. Roseanna Means, Commissioner

Introduction of Ground Rules

Commissioner Means welcomed the public and explained the system for testimony. She introduced the MCSW Commissioners and the former Chair and the current Chair of the Worcester City Manager's Status of Women Advisory Committee. Participants will present in the order in which they signed up and will have two minutes for their presentation.

Summary of Testimony

The following summaries are based on note-takers at the meeting, staff transcribing the audiocassette recording of the testimony, and written testimony provided by those who did not speak.

Louanne Branch

League of Women Voters

Ms. Branch introduced herself as a 1951 graduate of LaSalle High School who has an undergraduate and graduate degree and worked part-time while raising her children, full-time when they were grown, and part-time while caring for her ailing parents. Consequently, Ms. Branch has economic concerns regarding her retirement and social security benefits, as they are low. Ms. Branch also spoke about her concern that the nursing profession has labor issues such as requiring nurses to work overtime and disciplining them if they don't. She also stressed the importance of combating violence against women, women getting an education, women working together, and she noted how far women have come since the 1950's.

Ron Madnick

Executive Director, Worcester MA County Chapter, American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)

Mr. Madnick addressed the issues of pay inequity for women and insurance coverage for women. He spoke in support of legislation to account for time taken off from work by women raising children with regard to pensions, and in support of the gender-neutral health insurance and contraceptive coverage bills. He encouraged women to vote because they are the majority in Massachusetts and they should exercise that power.

Harriette Chandler***State Senator, First Worcester***

Sen. Chandler first addressed the issue of housing in Worcester, where a majority of people seeking affordable housing are women. While Worcester has more than their goal of 10% of housing units being subsidized and affordable, the demand is greater than the supply. Waiting lists for people with Section 8 vouchers are almost three years long. Massachusetts's rents are so high that a single mother making minimum wage would have to work 87 hours a week to afford a two-bedroom apartment. The legislature must continue to focus on this important issue.

Senator Chandler spoke about the need to increase the minimum wage and jobs for women. She recognized that Commissioner Casavant has been a true leader in the area of minimum wage. Senator Chandler noted that jobs traditionally held by women are often minimum and low wage jobs and that housing costs are skyrocketing.

Since the number of seniors will double in the next thirty years, it will be necessary to have more workers in the health care industry. It is important to make sure that there are ways for women to get training and jobs in the nursing field, especially since nearly all the nursing hospitals in Massachusetts have been closed. In Massachusetts, the average age of nurses is 47 and we cannot get enough help in our hospitals, nursing homes, day help areas, and community health care areas to satisfy the tremendous need.

Senator Chandler also spoke about the new laws supporting universal health insurance coverage for children in Massachusetts under the age of nineteen. However, it is important to make sure the children actually *get* the preventative health care they need. Additionally, it is difficult for seniors to pay their prescription drug costs, and Sen. Chandler is filing legislation to make sure drugs that are not used by nursing homes are not thrown away. Sen. Chandler noted that 12 of the 40 state senators are now women, which is the biggest percentage in Massachusetts to date. She also spoke about a bill that the legislature passed into law this year that guarantees eligibility for unemployment insurance for victims of domestic violence who leave their jobs or are fired due to domestic violence.

Angela Bellas***Educator, Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts***

Written testimony on file.

Ms. Bellas spoke in favor of Senate Bill 805, which requires individual and group health insurance plans to cover hormone replacement therapy and FDA approved contraceptive drugs, devices and services to the same extent that the plans cover other prescription drugs and devices (Gender Neutral Health Insurance).

Ms. Bellas also stated that today in Massachusetts, there are no standard regulations for comprehensive sexuality education and she hopes that we will join the Surgeon General's call for comprehensive, medically accurate and age appropriate sexuality education.

Janet Door

YWCA/Day Break Program

Ms. Door reported that last year, the Day Break program served more than 10,000 individuals who were impacted by domestic violence. The program has a hotline, a shelter, legal advocates, short-term counseling, support groups and educational programs. Ms. Door addressed the need for more affordable housing for victims of domestic violence. Too often, women leave abusive situations and have no place to live.

Ms. Door also noted that within the last two years or so, the women who go to the Day Break program have a lot more severe problems such as mental health and severe substance abuse problems than in the past. This needs to be addressed because these women cannot be treated effectively in this program (women with substance abuse problems cannot be accepted in the shelter because of the need to keep their other clients safe). Finally, Ms. Door also spoke about the need for funding for domestic violence prevention and education programs.

Stephanie E. Goldenhersh

Family Law Attorney, Legal Assistance Corp. of Central MA

Written testimony on file.

Attorney Goldenhersh and her colleagues represent low-income victims and survivors of domestic violence. She noted that there are a multitude of ways in which domestic violence affects women and children; however, she addressed the particular issues of a batterer's access to children through visitation and custody. "We know statistically that boys raised in this environment are more likely to become batterers as adults and girls are more likely to become victims."

Attorney Goldenhersh and her colleagues understand that visiting with the batterer can have many effects on children, however they often advise their clients to be open to, and encourage, the idea of supervised or even unsupervised visitation, otherwise, they risk losing custody of their children due to "parental alienation" (obstruction of the relationship with their father). Also, when a mother is in an abusive relationship, she can be charged with neglect for exposing the children to their abusive father, or for failing to protect them from him.

Attorney Goldenhersh feels that education on the effects of domestic violence must reach all court personnel and anyone who is involved in domestic violence cases.

Katherine Ireland

Single Mother

Ms. Ireland, a single mother of three children, is a first time homebuyer. She was able to come up with her down payment by working three jobs and with assistance from state and federal grants. Ms. Ireland is pleased to be a homeowner, but is extremely concerned about crime in the city of Worcester. Her 14-year-old daughter, who is in DSS custody, is involved in a youth prostitution ring run by drug dealers. Her daughter is not receiving the mental and physical health care she needs, has not been brought to the hospital for a rape kit and is now cutting herself and overdosing on painkillers. Ms. Ireland wants DSS and the police to work with her to keep her daughter from further harm.

Betty Hotchsons

College Professor

Ms. Hotchsons is a college professor in the state system and earned a Ph.D. in molecular biology after raising her children. She spoke about issues facing older women, including the need for economic stability and health care. She noted that women who work part-time while raising families are not afforded the same pension benefits as men under the state pension system. This inequity also affects health insurance for older women. Ms. Hotchsons said that men and women must work together since the state system is unfair to older women. She ended by saying that she certainly wants to support the work on violence against women and children.

Jessica LaFlamme and Stephanie Dow

Girls, Inc.

Miss LaFlamme addressed the issue of sex education, which she feels is greatly misunderstood. She said that as teenagers, students need to be educated about their bodies, mental health and sexual orientation issues so that they are empowered to make appropriate decisions regarding their own sexuality as needed. She feels that sex education should be taught in a relaxed school setting by knowledgeable teachers who are comfortable with discussing sex issues, so that students can ask questions about birth control, sexual orientation, and other related issues.

Miss Dow said that sexual harassment is a very big issue for teenagers and that our society always blames the woman and she feels that nothing is ever done about it. She suggests that more attention should be paid to teenagers and sexual harassment and that everyone needs to be educated to respect girls/women no matter what they are wearing or what their circumstances are.

Kristina Allen

Chairman, Westborough Board of Selectmen & Court Advocate, Safe Plan

Ms. Malone testified that domestic violence cuts across the issues of education and affordable housing. She stressed the importance of affordable housing for domestic violence victims. To become free of domestic violence, women need an affordable place to live and care for their families. She advocated state funded incentives for providing affordable housing for victims of domestic violence. Chairman Allen also spoke about mandatory violence prevention education in schools and the importance of role models for young children.

Linda Cavioli

Executive Director, YWCA

Ms. Cavioli said that economic development and self-sufficiency will only result when women have access to critically needed affordable, high quality childcare. Although the legislature has sponsored several bills to this effect, Ms. Cavioli advocated taking a new look at how childcare is funded with regard to the number of slots for children by age because there is a great need for infant toddler slots. Ms. Cavioli said that there is a great need for day care centers to be able to pay their staff above a living wage and to keep up with all the licensing costs.

Penny Marston

Girls, Inc.

Ms. Marson spoke in support of programs for girls. These programs have many positive effects on girls including increased self worth and empowerment. She praised the girls from Girls, Inc., who testified earlier.

Karen Moran

Social Studies Educator

Ms. Moran, a teacher who taught in Michigan, stated that any Michigan public school teacher in the position of talking about sexuality or sexual issues was required by state law to take a sex education course. This helped to avoid "blushing teachers" and made them more comfortable with, and knowledgeable about, the subject. Ms. Moran applauded the fact that the Commission provides a forum where young and old could express their issues of concern.

Carol Koslowski

Clerk, Worcester Advisory Committee on the Status of Women

Ms. Koslowski spoke about the drug Gammahydroxybutyrate (GHB), which is also known as the "date rape drug." Ms. Koslowski brought information on the drug and expressed her interest in sponsoring legislation that would help make people aware of the drug and what it does to their body when ingested. She also

brought statistics on the drug Methylenedioxymethamphetamine (Ecstasy) and expressed interest in taking action on behalf of the girls and women who are being introduced to this drug.

Closing Remarks

Dr. Roseanna Means, Commissioner

Commissioner Means expressed her appreciation and thanked the audience for attending the hearing. She encouraged participants to talk to each other and network.

Issue Boards

Participants were invited to write anonymous comments on post-it notes and stick them to the appropriate Issue Board during the hearing.

The topics covered by the Issue Boards were: Child Care, Economic Development/Stability, Girls' Issues, Health Care, Violence Against Women, and Other.



Child Care

- ⇒ Lack of affordable and accessible childcare is a predominant issue for women.
- ⇒ Children of all socio-economic groups need safe childcare. Children at the middle school level are being left on their own to drift without structure.
- ⇒ Parents need to be educated on how to parent and reminded often (like TV PSA's).
- ⇒ Affordable available childcare is essential.
- ⇒ If you provide child care slots you'll probably find some families will be able to get off subsidized housing or at least decrease the share the state/fed need to pay toward their rent.

Economic Development/Stability

- ⇒ Single mothers are barely given enough assistance to survive.
- ⇒ Equal pay for equal work, without a fair livable (beyond) minimum wage and affordable housing, society falls apart.

Girls' Issues

- ⇒ Support and encourage, teach girls to have a sense of self and an ability to make choices. Change the image of the compliant woman to a full partner.
- ⇒ Youth are not given enough sexuality education and are generally at highest risk for STD's, HIV and unintended pregnancy.
- ⇒ Educating girls (and boys) empowers them to become strong women (and mothers and fathers).
- ⇒ Encourage girls to be active in school, work, etc.
- ⇒ Encourage girls to be the best they can be, to grow, to learn, to contribute.

Health Care

- ⇒ Age appropriate sexuality education is essential and PPLM dos the best job at it- and reach the boys.
- ⇒ I support sex-ed (comprehensive) in public and private schools. Worcester is lacking that and our numbers are showing that. Need comprehensive sex-ed in Worcester Public Schools.
- ⇒ Health promotion and prevention across ages.
- ⇒ There is a great need for standardized sexuality education across the state.
- ⇒ Sex education and access to health care are big gaps for all women young to old.
- ⇒ My mom is a Brockton hospital nurse who recently was on strike. I support zero mandatory overtime for nurses and better salary and benefits for nurses.
- ⇒ Women and children should have total access to comprehensive care. Including learning to effectively communicate with their physician. More sex-ed starting in grade K.
- ⇒ I am a professor in the MA college system, permanent part time for 11 years, after being college faculty in Allied Health (TX), a private engineering college (MA) for over 10 years and after 10+ years in the publishing and high tech industries, as well as 10 years at home with my children, I am 65. When I retire I will have no state pension- it's 20 years ½ time to be vested. And the state GIC-based health insurance will

terminate. I will have Medicare only. State law and Board of Higher Education contract could amend this.

- I'm Jessica LaFlamme from Girls Inc. and I believe people should have a stronger, more efficient sex-education. We live in a different time, where you need to be educated in areas such as sexuality. Students take on a "shy" attitude of sex, because their instructors don't get unto depth, which is desperately needed, things like sexual orientation and knowledge of condoms and birth control would create a more open atmosphere preventing ignorance, which often leads to life altering decision.

Violence Against Women

- Yes, I agree, more has to be done.
- I agree- Violence against women and all of the subsequent issues is of dire importance to address.
- Yes, tell kids hitting/violence in not okay, but please give them a way out!
- I support any program and federal funding for prevention of violence against women.
- I agree Violence against women is one of the biggest issues facing women.
- Must have standardized violence prevention education state wide, with men teaching boys.
- I applaud your idea of a public education campaign against violence. It should be our first level of attack on terrorism!
- Need statewide funded affordable housing for victims and families.
- Need to control batterer's legal access to children.
- As a feminist, mother, and biologist I support sex education and behavioral public health outreach to boys, young men, and adult men- yes, involve their organizations.
- I agree this is an important topic. It causes too much pain.
- Yes, effective, statewide sex-ed, age appropriate is needed. Work between public such as PPLM and state education.
- There is a need for more forums on domestic violence, also funding and any kind of help women can get.

- ⇒ I would like to get anger management taught in schools, as well as the skills to critically evaluate the messages one receives from TV and the media. I like the public health manner of addressing domestic violence.
- ⇒ Community wide support- (police, DSS courts)- sending a clear message that S/A will not be tolerated in Worcester City.
- ⇒ Cooperation among all concerned, support systems, police, DSS, schools, hospitals, and the city and justice officials all need to recognize the problems and deal with it.
- ⇒ Mandatory issue to be addressed, I'm a victim!

Other

- ⇒ Thank you for having a website focused on what's happening or needs to happen on these issues. I'm eager to visit it and encourage you to help women and girls become aware of it.
- ⇒ Children suffer from stress created by violence in homes against mothers.
- ⇒ My issues are mostly environment related. It involves all aspects of daily life.
- ⇒ Thank you for hearing my testimony and I hope to resolve many issues through the contacts.